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NORTH KOREA AND THE UNITED STATES: LEARNING HOW TO WAGE PEACE IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Introduction

While the relationship between the United States and North Korea has been effectively stalled for sixty years, this could be changing. A diplomatic and economic client of the Soviet Empire, North Korea was severely affected by the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 (1,2). Set adrift from the Soviet bloc, suffering from almost a decade of famine, North Korea is being forced to alter the way in which it interacts with the rest of the world, or face total collapse. There is potential for great improvement in the United States/North Korean relationship, but not without significant risk. The Kim Jong Il regime has developed and maintained a strong military, and one of its only significant exports is weaponry: ballistic missiles, missile technology, and the technology for building chemical, biological, and likely nuclear weapons (3). It is the potential for use and sale of weapons of mass destruction that makes North Korea of vital strategic interest to the United States. This essay will first examine the strategic interests represented by North Korea; secondly, the means currently employed by the United States to achieve the desired ends. Lastly, recommendations for a potential future course of action, and the possible outcomes, will be discussed. In the final analysis, the most likely outcome for the Korean peninsula is reunification. It remains to be seen if this can be accomplished without further violence.

National Interests, National Security

Reviewing "America's National Interests" demonstrates that North Korea bridges vital, extremely important, important, as well as secondary interests (4). The authors state that "vital interests" are those "strictly necessary to safeguard and enhance Americans' survival and well being in a free and secure nation" (4:5). First among these applies to North Korea, "Prevent, deter and reduce the threat of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons attacks on the United States or its military forces abroad". Extremely important interests include "Prevent, deter, and reduce the threat of the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons anywhere" and "Prevent the regional proliferation of WMD and delivery systems" (4:5). North Korea has a prominent place in all of these interests. North Korea has the capability to attack United States forces in South Korea with vast stores of chemical and biological weapons (5), and it is widely believed that North Korea has one or more nuclear devices (3). Of perhaps even greater concern, if these missiles and munitions are made available to terrorist organizations, they could potentially be used against the civilian population of the United States. This is the greatest threat posed by North Korea, and the overriding concern of US strategic policy (4). Two other "extremely important" national interests in this region are to "promote the well-being of US allies and friends and protect them from external aggression" and "Prevent, manage, and, if possible at reasonable cost, end major conflict in important geographical regions" (4:6). Both of these apply to North Korea. United States' allies in the region include South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. East Asia can be nothing but an "important geographical region"; the two largest nuclear powers (Russia and China) as well as our Asian allies all reside in this area. Five of the ten "important interests" are

also applicable to North Korea: 1) discouraging massive human rights violations, 2) promoting pluralism, freedom and democracy, 3) reducing the economic gap between rich and poor nations, 4) international distribution of information to ensure that American values continue to positively influence their culture, and 5) promote international environmental policies consistent with long-term ecological requirements (4:7).

The broad categories found in the recently released 2002 National Security Strategy reiterate the importance of North Korea to the United States (6). North Korea has been branded a "rogue state…..the world's principal purveyor of ballistic missiles" by the United States (6:14). This document asserts the United States is committed to using **every instrument of power** to "prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends, with weapons of mass destruction" (6:2). Recognition of the importance of regional stability across the globe only emphasizes the critical nature of our relationship with North Korea, and is the basis for the need to both "look to Japan to continue forging a leading role in regional and global affairs" as well as "work with South Korea to maintain vigilance towards the North while preparing our alliance to make contributions to the broader stability of the region over the longer haul" (6:26). There can be no doubt that the United States sees the importance of the relationship with North Korea.

What specifically are the goals? What is the United States trying to achieve in its interaction with North Korea? First, to prevent the country from building, using, or threatening the use of, nuclear weapons; either against U.S. forces in the region or against friendly neighboring countries, specifically South Korea or Japan. Second, to stop North Korea from stockpiling, using and distributing other weapons of mass destruction, specifically chemical and biological munitions. Third, to reduce the development and

sale of increasingly sophisticated ballistic missiles to other nations or terrorist groups. A final very important interest is reducing the likelihood of conventional military conflict between North and South Korea, in effect reducing the risk of conventional war between the United States and North Korea. Lastly, the United States wants to achieve all of the afore mentioned "important interests" (improving the economic and social lives of the population, protecting the environment, educating North Koreans about America, etc).

Current Strategy of the United States

Despite the massive resources* spent over the past 60 years maintaining a strong military presence in South Korea, the United States has been unsuccessful in achieving any of these goals. Some important concepts seem constantly under appreciated. In order to understand why this relationship is so strained, and why the road to improvement so difficult, it is important to recognize the historical context. North Korea views the world quite differently than the United States, or any other democratic nation, views the world. To be successful, the United States Strategic policy in the Korean Peninsula must take into account not just its own interaction with North Korea, but include consideration of the North Korean relationships with its important regional neighbors: South Korea, China, Japan, and Russia. The historical context and the interrelationships of these nations to North Korea and each other must also be considered. Most importantly, only by investing in all of the instruments of power, and by demonstration of the United States' commitment to achieving the "important" interests, is there much hope of peacefully achieving the vital and very important goals the United States has set out.

* South Korea will need to spend approximately thirty billion dollars just the first year to offset the defense capabilities of the United States if they withdrew from the Korean Peninsula (7).

Japan forcibly annexed Korea in 1910, terminating over a thousand years of independence. Japan ruled with an iron hand until forced to relinquish its empire at the conclusion of WW II (8). Following the surrender of Japan at the conclusion of WW II, Korea (like Germany) was partitioned; the Soviet regime took responsibility for the administration of the country north of the 38th parallel, and the US for the administration of the South. This arrangement lasted only a short time. In 1950 the Army of the North invaded the South, with the aim of reunification under the communist umbrella (see table 1). Following protracted fighting between South Korean (aided by the United Nations, primarily the United States) and North Korean (aided by the Chinese, and indirectly by the Soviet Union), the border was reestablished, and an armistice signed in 1953. Since that time, the United States has maintained 37,000 troops in South Korea to deter a repeat of the 1950 invasion. The United States' military presence, both in South Korea and Japan, is widely believed to have contributed greatly to maintaining stability in the region (1,2). Since that time, and particularly within the last decade, South Korea developed strong democratic institutions and an enviable economy. Conversely, following initial decades of relative economic success while aligned with the Soviet Union, North Korea has seen its GDP and standard of living decline precipitously. The famine has been so severe, and for such duration, that there is concern in the medical community that much of the present generation may have permanent physiological and psychological damage from simple malnutrition (9, 10).

While the National Security Strategy states that America will use "all instruments of power" to achieve its ends, what **is** the United States doing militarily, politically, economically and diplomatically in its engagement with North Korea? In fact, the

military presence is the only instrument of power which has been used consistently since the conclusion of the Korean War. The United States has maintained a large standing force in South Korea, with even greater air power in neighboring Japan (11-14). Combined United States and South Korean forces have provided deterrence, preventing North Korea from again invading the South. In addition to vastly superior technology and training, the U.S. and South Korean forces routinely train to survive, fight, and win in nuclear, biologically or chemically contaminated battle space. Increased preparedness not only negates much of the fear inspired by WMD, but may potentially prevent North Korea from using these weapons (if it perceives these weapons not to confer sufficient operational advantage to offset the political disadvantage).

The other potentially useful instruments of power (economic, diplomatic, cultural and informational) are either essentially unused, or being used in almost entirely negative ways. Examination of table 2 shows that there has been minimal high level interaction between the United States and North Korea since the termination of the Korean War. The one significant economic/diplomatic effort during the last decade is the "Agreed Framework" (1). The "Agreed Framework", brokered in 1994, was essentially an agreement for North Korea to indefinitely interrupt its nuclear weapons development program in exchange for international assistance in building two light water nuclear power plants and a massive amount of conventional energy aid in the form of oil and gas. While the agreement was hailed as a success at the time, neither side has honored its commitment; the power plants remain in the planning stage, oil deliveries have been erratic, and North Korea has now admitted continuing its nuclear weapons development program (15,16).

As for the economic instrument, the United States has no active economic interest in North Korea. There is no investment by the United States in North Korea; it has maintained economic sanctions on North Korea for most of the years since 1953. While many sanctions were lifted in 1996, there is still no trade; North Korea has essentially nothing to sell except arms, and no cash with which to import goods. With North Korea's refusal to meaningfully reform its economy, there is minimal potential for western foreign investment. Under these conditions, the economic instrument is currently not really being used.

Diplomatically, our relationship is still almost non-existent. The United States has no embassy in North Korea: they have none in the United States. While experts in the field have stated that normalizing relations with the United States is Kim Song Il's number one priority for 2003, the North Korean government has not stated it, and the United States does not see much concrete evidence that it is true (17,18), and has responded with great skepticism. The United States has essentially ignored North Korea for the second half of the twentieth century, with the exception of angry speeches following each of the actions illustrated in Table 2. In point of fact, the level of malignant rhetoric leveled against North Korea has if anything intensified, beginning with the "Axis of Evil" reference by President Bush in the State of the Union Address in January 2002 (19).

The last two recognized instruments, cultural and informational, are equally underutilized in our current relationship with North Korea. Admittedly, it is difficult to interact in any meaningful way with a country that maintains total control over its population, particularly when their historical culture in terms of religion, music, sports

and art are fundamentally dissimilar. Information operations are also difficult. Admittedly, if the United States makes a sincere effort, it is hard to communicate directly with a population that has neither access to western TV, radio, or print media, nor meaningful Internet capability (13). Difficult does not equate to impossible however, and the United States is investing essentially no time, money or effort in the nonmilitary instruments of power.

Recommendations for the Future

What can the United States do to increase the likelihood of achieving the goals it has set for its relationship with North Korea? First, at least one of the reasons North Korea continues developing weapons of mass destruction is to merit international attention (20). In the absence of militarization and weapons of mass destruction, North Korea would be just another in a long queue of failing dictatorships. Not only does the armament industry supply North Korea the tangible benefit of foreign income; it brings this country to the attention of the United States. A unique set of circumstances* now exists which gives the United States an opportunity to improve its relationship with North Korea. This opportunity should be exploited. Without appearing weak or indecisive, the United States can, and must, substantially increase its investment in all the instruments of power.

*Circumstances include: (a) collapse of Soviet Union; (b) decade of famine due to weather and (most importantly) agricultural and economic system; (c) recent political pressure from being lumped with the "axis of evil" and concern about the possible preemptive option/intention of the United States; (d) South Korean "Sunshine Policy"; (e) Japan less willing to donate food with nothing substantive in return, and (f) recent admission of Nuclear Weapons development allows it to be used as a bargaining chip.

While not necessarily retracting the "axis of evil" analogy, the United States should give North Korea an alternative public image to achieve, instead of continuing to promulgate a negative image for it to live up to. The United States should issue firm public statements demonstrating that it believes the admission of the secret nuclear weapons program is clear indication that North Korea is now willing to negotiate in good faith. It should show the North Korean administration that the United States now believes North Korea is in fact a member of the family of nations, committed to the same global interests of prosperity and stability that other responsible, mature nations are committed to. The United States should make it clear that it understands North Korea is using its weapons program to gain power and respect, as well as income. It would be in the United States' interest to assist North Korea in finding alternative methods to better achieve these aims.

As long as weapons represent North Korea's most significant export, there is no incentive to stop selling them to the highest bidder. It will require very significant economic incentives to negate the income North Korea currently receives from its sale of weaponry. North Korea is destitute; trafficking in both conventional and unconventional weapons is an economic necessity. North Korea is very unlikely to be targeted militarily by any of its clients; from the North Korean viewpoint, weapons sales are as safe as the United States views its own military sales. Just as finding viable alternatives to drugs as their primary "cash crop" is the only real hope for Colombia and Afghanistan, North Korea must have realistic options if there is any hope of decreasing the munitions industry. The United States must not only be willing to invest substantively in alternate industrial efforts, it must convince the other regional powers that it is in their own interest

to do the same thing. Simultaneously, the United States must work in concert with the rest of the International Community to decrease the purchase of these munitions. In the case of non state actors and terrorist organizations seeking these products, the United States and its allies will need to commit to active interdiction beyond North Korea's sovereign borders to make these sales economically unattractive.

Second, the 1994 "Agreed Framework" should be viewed as a lesson in how NOT to negotiate with North Korea. Compliance brought no immediate benefit to North Korea, and there was no verification mechanism to reward the United States and its allies for upholding their part of the bargain. It was, as Senator John McCain (R, AZ) stated in an interview, a bribe and a delaying tactic, "I've said from the day it was written that the Agreed Framework was essentially a bribe, and as such, it has kicked this problem down the road a ways" (21). A strategy more likely to succeed, for example, would be to donate 100 tons of grain, or 100,000 gallons of heating oil **immediately** upon allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency team to examine the recently divulged secret weapons facility. Perhaps the inspectors and the grain could come in on the same ship! There must be a clear and immediate incentive for cooperation with international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. At the same time, the United States should press the other parties interested in regional stability (South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China) to participate in this simple "reward good behavior; punish bad behavior" strategy. Like any successful reward and punishment system, it must be seen as "cause and effect" by the party whose behavior they are trying to influence, i.e., the North Korean government. The North Korean regime must understand that there is no other way to get the aid it desperately needs except cooperation, and that it cannot

successfully "threaten" the region into donating aid. At the same time, humanitarian assistance must be used in a public diplomacy campaign, targeting the people of North Korea. Certainly the closed nature of the regime prevents the outside world from easily or accurately assessing the North Korean population's opinion, but it is believed that the population does know that the food aid generally comes from the United States, Japan and South Korea (22,23). This should be exploited, by signs or a distribution mechanism to allow the civilian population to see that the westernized these countries are helping, that they are not enemies.

The United States should initiate and take advantage of any and all opportunities for interaction with North Koreans, whether military personnel, politicians, or private citizens. While many might feel it is a radical approach, inviting North Korean Officers to attend United States military education institutions is minimal risk for possibly significant benefit. Like all foreign officers, the North Koreans could be excluded from sensitive briefings; but everything else presented at these schools is readily available on the web anyway. It would give their future military leadership a more realistic understanding of the United States. The time may be right; a recent example of new willingness of the North Korean government to allow its citizens exposure to the outside world was their participation in the Asian Games (24). The 600 people representing North Korea was the largest contingent of North Koreans to visit South Korea since the War ended in 1953. Recalling the "ping-pong" diplomacy of the 1970's as the United States began interacting with China, sports can bypass language and ideological barriers better than almost anything else (25). Sports, music and art, medicine; **any** interaction is better than no interaction to give North Korea an opportunity to develop a more realistic

appreciation of the rest of the world. Interaction and negotiation do not need to be equated with concessions, but they do invariably represent opportunity to impart information. The United States might start with inviting sports teams or musicians to tour the United States, followed by a reciprocal tour by Americans. South Korea has already begun this reapproachment: members of families divided by the Korean War are being allowed private reunions, and a small number of companies are moving to North Korea where less expensive labor is available. North Korea is making very tentative steps to make investment by South Korean businesses possible; even the smallest steps should be encouraged. These efforts should be given positive media attention; these are measures which would empower North Koreans, and lead them to the conclusion that they too have an investment in the stability of the region.

Becoming more active in the use of all the other instruments of power does **not** mean abandoning the one instrument that has been effective, military power. Some authors have suggested reducing the United States Military Presence in the region, both to save money and to send a message that we are not a threat (26,27). I believe that would be a very serious mistake. First, it could send a wrong message to our two staunchest allies (South Korea and Japan), i.e., that we are less committed to their security. These nations could easily interpret United States reductions as a need to significantly increase their own military buildup, and to develop their own weapons of mass destruction. Militarization of Japan, and greater militarization of South Korea could have very destabilizing results in Asia. China, already historically suspicious of Japan, might reasonably feel pressured to arm more aggressively if Japan were to militarize (which it would almost be forced to do if the United States withdrew).

Even more dangerous, a unilateral troop withdrawal would send a potentially very confusing signal to North Korea. It could easily be interpreted by the North Koreans that the United States has become "too busy" with the War on Terrorism or other issues to maintain a sufficient deterrent presence. That could in turn erroneously lead North Korea to the conclusion that they could achieve their aim of reunification by military means, in essence inviting an attack. If North Korea should attack the South, it would be very difficult to reestablish our presence during hostilities. The United States, in conjunction with South Korea, should maintain its significant military advantage. Russia and China have made it clear they will no longer support aggression on the part of North Korea. North Korea should never in doubt about the outcome of military action. While it is accepted that casualties on both sides would likely be very heavy, North Korea will lose if it attacks. Forced reunification would then take place by "regime change" and occupation by South Korea. It must continue to be very clear to the North Korean government that forced reunification is not in anyone's best interest, most especially its own, and that neither the United States nor Seoul want it.

What concerns do the other regional powers have, and how should those concerns affect the way the United States develops its relationship with North Korea? South Korea believes that reunification with the North will have been achieved by 2025, its military and political statements and plans all attest to that fact (28). Reunification is a long range, not immediate goal. South Korea has been assiduously studying what Germany went through with the reunification process, as well as ways to mitigate the negative effects on their economy while achieving the desired end. But the analogy between Germany and Korea is not perfect; there is still great animosity towards the North by the

South for initiating the war in 1950. Kim Dae Jung (president of South Korea) has determined that economic integration, and decreasing the income gap between North and South should optimally occur prior to political integration. He has instituted the "sunshine policy", actively opening dialogue between the two countries, and making a determined effort to separate economic and interpersonal from political and military activity. The effect is incremental change in private enterprise doing business in the North regardless of the current political climate. Thus, even following the June, 2002 naval crisis in which North Korea fired on a South Korean vessel (South Korea returned fire and sunk the intruder), the business ventures were not interrupted.

Since President Bush has taken office, there has been a divergence in the way the United States and South Korea approach negotiations with the North; the United States has appeared more bellicose, South Korea more genteel and accommodating. While most observers feel it is damaging for the United States and South Korea to appear divided in their approach to North Korea (29), it may work to our advantage. In the long run, reunification appears not only desirable but inevitable. As a result, it is much more important for North and South Korea to become close than whatever the United States and North Korea do. In the past year, the United States and South Korea have in effect been using the "good cop, bad cop" approach; the US takes a hard, almost belligerent stand towards Pyongyang, while South Korea makes every effort to appear conciliatory and increase cooperation between the two powers. A secondary positive diplomatic effect is that South Korea appears less subservient to the United States. While it is not obvious that the United States and South Korea have done this strategically (or even knowingly), the result has been positive. South Korea appears to be even more

amenable, and appears willing to "stand up" to its protector (the United States), in order to befriend North Korea.

It is not as clear what China, Japan and Russia see looming on the horizon with regard to North Korea, but they are important actors on the stage. The three accept reunification as inevitable, and they want it to occur slowly and peacefully (30,31). They see reunification not only as inevitable, but as desirable, primarily because they believe that North Korea cannot continue its present course of perpetual food dependence, and reunification would place the majority of responsibility for North Korean aid and development on South Korea. None of these countries want to see reunification by force. Both Russia and China have explicitly stated they will not support North Korea if it attempts reunification by military means, and certainly none of the three believe there is any chance South Korea will attack. They do differ in their view of the optimal balance of power they hope ensues from reunification of the two Koreas, and the role of the United States in the future. They are mutually concerned with the possible disproportionate power that could result from alliances between a unified Korea and the other nations. While China may not want a continued United States/Korean alliance, neither do they want a strong Japanese Korean relationship. Japan and Russia feel the same towards a close relationship between China and Korea. Ultimately, they may feel that continued United States presence is the least of the evils. The United States must work diligently, continuing to reassure all the significant regional actors that it is interested in maintaining stability and prosperity in Asia, not in driving wedges between any of the regional actors.

Conclusion

In summary, the United States has very effectively used its powerful military to maintain the status quo in its relationship with North Korea since the end of the Korean War. Military action has not actually been required; the presence of overwhelming military power has been a sufficient deterrent. This strategy, that of essentially forcing the United States' adversary to bankrupt itself attempting to compete militarily, has worked before; the result was the demise of the Soviet Union, and subsequent (admittedly variably successful) political and economic reforms in Russia and the subordinate Republics. The United States did not unilaterally disarm, nor retreat from its European bases following the cold war. The United States did however, seem to understand the strategic advantage of assisting Russia and many of the former states with economic investment, political and diplomatic interaction, cultural exchange, and security of its nuclear arsenal. The United States generally treated Russia with the respect due a great power. The United States should extrapolate from the experience, and utilize a very similar strategy to help successfully meet the challenge of North Korea. Continuous militarization, and refusal to reform its Stalinist economy, has caused North Korea to spend itself into massive foreign debt, and desperate social and economic conditions. There is now an unprecedented opportunity to incrementally, but positively and consistently, influence the future of North Korean and United States' relations. Without reducing its military commitment to South Korea, the United States should aggressively seek opportunities to use all the instruments of power. Employing such a strategy has the potential to improve the circumstances of the millions who live in North Korea, at the same time advancing the vital interests of the United States. Of course, there is no

guarantee of success using this strategy. North Korea could still attack; forces in South Korea to may still be required to "fight tonight", as their motto states. Regardless of whether or not military action is ultimately used, an expanded use of all instruments of power would still be a successful strategy on the larger international stage. If North Korea invades across the DMZ, and the United States is forced to fight a second war on the Korean peninsula, it will be done with both the domestic and international communities' knowledge and understanding that every opportunity to prevent war had been exhausted.

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